

Transcript of Reagan Interview on a Range of Foreign Issues

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 11 — Following is a transcript of an interview with President Reagan today by Bernard Weinraub, Hedrick Smith, Leslie H. Gelb and Gerald M. Boyd, all of the Washington Bureau, as transcribed by The New York Times.

Military Balance

Q. We just want to start off with some foreign policy questions first. O.K.?

A. All right.

Q. And a question on arms control: Are we going into negotiations in a position of inferiority?

A. That we are not up to the strength level of the Soviet Union — Q. Right.

A. — militarily?

Q. Yes.

A. I don't think there's any question of that. The — and we have been for quite some time — we have been, for example, nuclear weapons. We have fewer warheads than we had in 1967.

But I think in one way we're going in a stronger sense than we have in recent years. Because over recent years we've followed the kind of unilaterally disarming and the idea that maybe the others would follow suit.

This time, with the refurbishing of our military defenses we've been undergoing for these four years, we're going to the table and they have the knowledge that not only are we stronger than we were, even though we've not caught up with them as yet, but they have the awareness that we're determined to not allow them to have a superiority over us to the extent that our forces would be a deterrent. And I think in that regard we sit down at the table with a little more realism than there's been in the past.

Q. Isn't there — statements by your own people, the candidate for President, and by Secretary of State George Shultz to the effect that we are not able to match the Soviet military balance in the few years, and that otherwise we could not negotiate on an even basis?

A. Well, I was trying to be completely accurate here but obviously we have not completely caught up with the imbalance between us. For example, we have in uniform 17 divisions. They've got more than that on the Chinese border. And we have not caught up with the naval buildup. But the fact that we are doing — that there are 24 more ships, I believe, out there, scheduled for addition to the fleet — that is what I think brings us to the table. They have — they know our industry and they know what we've been able to do to achieve when we set our minds to it.

They know that there's been a change of attitude. We are not getting weapons systems without getting anything in return. And from that standpoint I think this is — our attitude is different now and they can look down the road and see a point at which they won't have any margin of superiority. And they don't have enough of a margin today, I think, to tempt them into — a first strike.

Treaty Violations

Q. On the subject of arms control treaty violations, you and your administration have said for several years that the Soviets are violating these treaties. A, what do you intend to do about that and B, would you sign treaties in the future without clearing up those matters?

A. Well, I think all of that is part of a process to be negotiated and probably under the cap of — the part of the negotiations that I believe will be verifiable. In other words, it's not enough to have an agreement. It's got to be a verifiable agreement. And some of the violations that they're doing are violations of what have been negotiated as the right of each one of us to know about the other. The encrypting of the signals that some of our nuclear tests would send, ordinarily we would be able, simply electronically, to have the facts that that test is going up and whether or not both sides should have. But then they have been encrypting so that we don't get that full information. And all of these will be part of the negotiations.

Q. Do those violations block the possibility of another agreement until they are cleared up?

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aware of this over there and are going to — neither one of them look to that third element for any kind of help or alliance. And, as I say, we will just continue to do everything we can as a long-range effort to see that the Philippines remain a democracy.

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The New York Times/Paul Hefner

President Reagan during interview yesterday in the Oval Office.

weapons that you've proposed, would you still want to proceed with this Strategic Defense Initiative or would you be ready to call it off in return for that?

A. Well, I would want to proceed with what we're doing, which is research to discover whether there is such a weapon and whether it is practical, feasible, and then I myself said that my own view would be that if that is determined and we can produce such a weapon, that then before deployment I'd be willing to sit down, and in a sense internationalize — in other words, to negotiate them before there would be any deployment or anything, to make sure that they understood that we weren't trying to create the ability of a first strike ourselves, that our goal was still the elimination of nuclear weapons, and that I would see that defensive weapon as another step in attaining that goal.

Q. But if we can say that this virtually makes those weapons, if not obsolete, certainly most ineffective — the nuclear weapons — then we've got a real reason for saying we'd like to do away with them. Because we've come up with this defensive weapon. That would eliminate any of the protests that some of the people on the Soviet side have made that we're seeking a first strike capability. I don't think anyone could honestly believe that the United States is interested in such a thing or ever would be at that position.

Q. So proceeding with the Strategic Defense is independent of whatever agreement is reached —

A. That's right.

Q. — on offensive weapons?

A. Because it's not in violation of the ABM treaty, and they have been conducting — you know, who are they kidding? They've been conducting research in sort of things for a long time. And they already have far beyond anything we have, and we believe in violation of the ABM treaty of that kind of defense. And we're seeking a non-nuclear weapon that could render these weapons obsolete.

Q. Sir, just — excuse me — back on Latin America — Fidel Castro said recently that he saw possibilities for improving relations with the U.S. Do you see any possibility of a U.S. — of you or the Government improving relations with Castro?

A. Well, I'm not very optimistic, because we've heard this before. Early in my administration there were signals sent of this kind, and we tried to do something about it, and we tried to have some meetings with them and nothing came of it. Their words — they're never backed by deeds. There are very simple things that they can do to indicate that they were ready to change.

Q. On the Middle East, Mr. President, do you expect a current review of the arms-sale policy to result in some kind of change in U.S. policy in the region?

A. Well now, you're asking about the Middle East.

A. In arms policies, though.

Q. Yes, you're conducting a review of arms policies.

A. Yes.

Q. — policy.

A. Well, I'm not — I'm still dedicated to that Sept. 1, 1982, provision of a negotiated peace. I don't believe it can be achieved without King Hussein of Jordan, and with — or at least with the permission of the Palestinians, representing them in direct negotiations with the Israelis. And what we — we are prepared to be of whatever help we can be. We're not seeking to impose a settlement on anyone. We haven't got some plan of how it must be worked out.

But I feel that we have to make the moderate Arab states recognize that we can be their friend as well as the friend of Israel. And this could be helpful in our trying to help peace negotiations. And part of this would be — they're under threat — there's a war going on just minutes away from them by the Soviet Union — with its invasion of Afghanistan has made it evident that the Middle East can't rule out the possibility of expansionism on the part of the Soviets there. And we think that they're entitled to some defensive weapons also. At the same time, we

have insured Israel that we will never see them lose their qualitative edge to the point that they're endangered by anything we do.

Q. Do you see an opportunity, at this point, to push the peace initiative of yours once again? With the Fahd visit and other developments, is this the time to make another move?

A. I'm going to talk to — we have another meeting coming tomorrow morning. I'm going to talk to him so that he knows that we haven't retreated. The fact that the events in Lebanon and so forth have kind of put the plan on ice was not only that. If you remember, there was a very dramatic breaking-off of relations between the P.L.O. and King Hussein. Hussein was going forward and trying to work them and then suddenly they parted company. Now there have been talks resumed, because — anyone who talks for the Arab side is going to have to be able to represent the Palestinian problem in these negotiations. You can't write them off or ignore their rights. And so what we're trying to talk about — we're hoping that this can now come to the point that there can be direct negotiations.

Q. Do you put any limit on who can represent the Palestinians?

A. Well, it's more or less has to be worked out between them and King Hussein as to whether they would permit him, or whether they will want direct representation, and then I think with the Israelis the issue comes up, then — will whoever represents the Palestinians be willing to say that they recognize the right of Israel to exist as a nation? It's why we can't enter into any negotiations with the Palestinians — the P.L.O. — as long as they say that. How do you talk to a country and say to a country, "You should negotiate with these people," when "these people" say, "We don't recognize that country's right to exist?"</